

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada in Guadalajara, Mexico

August 10, 2009

President Calderon. Right honorable Mr. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, Right Honorable Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, ladies and gentlemen, representatives of the media, national as well as international: The leaders from the United States, Canada, and Mexico have completed two fruitful workdays for the benefit of our conationals. The leaders for North America share the vision and insight for one—for only regional community that is safe, secure, and competitive, that can face successfully the challenges of the present and the future.

We coincide in pointing out that in an age marked by globalization, the challenges can only be overcome jointly, thus the importance of keeping the dialog, trust, and cooperations amongst our three countries. Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans have reiterated that the values upon which our societies are founded are democracy, freedom, justice, and the respect of human rights.

Our three nations have reiterated our decision to combat and struggle of the transnational organized crime in order to bring about more security to our communities. The struggles we have led in Mexico for the rule of law and the security of our Mexican people forces us to stop the traffic of weapons and of money that go from north to south that strengthen and nourish organized crime gangs. The notions of responsibility, coresponsibility, accountability, the exchange of information, and the building of our institutions should be the guidelines for our cooperation.

In this international crisis context, the three states that make up the North American region have to take the leadership and foster and boost the necessary measures to recover our economic growth. In our task, we have had to implement countercyclical measures in the three countries that have been put into action. And in a coordinated manner, we can stabilize our economies and thus bring about trustworthiness and certainty in regard to the future of the global economy.

It is also necessary to build our financial international institutions such as the World Fund, the International Monetary Fund, which are fundamental to guarantee the flow of the financial resources. In the case of Latin America, the support that will enable us to recapitalize the Inter-American Bank for Development will be the best action for help and commitment in regard to the poor countries in the region on behalf of the North American countries.

I am certain that at the next G–20 meeting that shall take place in Pittsburgh, United States, will be a great opportunity to build the necessary agreements to reform these organizations that are key in the recovery of our economies and our reprisal. I thank President Obama for fostering this meeting in Pittsburgh.

And likewise, the United States, Mexico, and Canada have to restart our agreements. We recognize that it is essential to abide by NAFTA and to resolve the pending topics that impede us to reach greater regional competitiveness. And it is important to see how we are going to fulfill our commitments in regard to the environment and in regard to our labor domains

linked to the commercial agreements, the trade agreements we have amongst our countries. I am convinced that only in tapping the advantages offered by our economic complementarities, in terms of investments, labor, technologies, and natural resources, we shall be successful in a world that is ferociously competing.

At this summit, we have reached important agreements such as boosting the standardization of the regulations and certifications of our products, as well as the sanitary procedures and fight to sanitary procedures that can be simplified, as well as increasing without any losses, increasing the economic competitiveness of our region. The objective is to have in—secure and efficient conditions, these procedures to be implemented with no bureaucratic or far-fetched redtape in our offices. And this will diminish—decrease the prices for the staples and food and improve the competitiveness of our economies.

On the other hand, on the bilateral aspects, Mexico and the United States will launch modernization initiatives at our common borders with determined terms in order to promote the regional competitiveness actions. And Mexico commends and is pleased to say that we're going to inaugurate the first international bridge that is currently being built after so many years between the United States and Mexico.

The United States, Mexico, and Canada have coincided in the importance to face the repercussions of pragmatic change. The cost is very high, but the price we shall pay for lack of actions is not to be calculated—cannot possibly be calculated. We coincide that we have to foster the global agreement in Copenhagen and the instrumentation for a green fund that will finance and support mitigation and adaptation actions in regard to the global scale of the climatic change. We need to make progress in regard to clean energies and technologies, as well as the development of our carbon bonus market in order to have a regional market. North America has to be recognized as a responsible region and must set the example for the world in terms of environmental cooperation amongst countries with different levels of development.

Cooperation and solidarity amongst the North American region has to prevail at all moments, and thus it was demonstrated last April when our three countries faced the emergence of this new virus, A1H1—HN1. And working together, we showed our highest expressions of responsibility, accountability, and transparency. And because we alerted timely the other regions in the hemisphere, they had the opportunity to implement preventive measures in order to abate the propagation of the virus and to avoid as far as possible its lethal repercussions. H1N1, as we know, will be back this winter. We are getting prepared, all three countries, to face in a responsible manner this contingency and abate its impacts for our people.

First Minister, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, at this summit, the representatives of the United States, Canada, and Mexico have held an open and straightforward dialog as corresponds countries that share values, that were to consolidate the right conditions for development, and that have been able to found a successful society based on brotherly and responsible relationships. We believe in a North American region that is united, that is prosperous and wealthy, that is able to build a better future for the forthcoming generations.

And I want to give the floor now to Mr. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister for Canada.

Prime Minister Harper. Thank you, President Calderon. Thank you to the Mexican people for their hospitality, for their warmth. And thank you to President Obama for your straightforward exchanges, so positive on our priorities. These stakes consisted mainly of the economy, health, and security in the North American region and consisted—and focused on

energy, environment, and climate change in regard to the North American economy and the global economy.

And thanks to the solid results in Canada with regard to financial regulations and fiscal actions—have been very positive contribution. It's been important that since we are getting close to the G-20 meeting, we have to underscore that countries have to go on with the reinforcement of their financial national/international institutions and to take the timely financial measures and to keep the markets open and to resist against protectionism.

In regard to the health domain and in regard to the influenza A1H1, it has been a threat, but the excellent cooperation amongst our three countries has helped us to restrain the repercussions of this plague, and we shall focus on that even more.

In regard to security, Canada recognizes the courageous commitment taken by President Calderon to combat organized crime in Mexico. We commend him for his efforts and since his actions have touched all of us.

And we are still making the greatest efforts in Canada to find a pacific resolution for Honduras. We have to reinstate the democratic governance and the rule of law in that country.

In regard to the energy and the climate change, and since our economies are integrated, we have discussed about the importance of working together on a North American focus against the climate change and in order to assure and guarantee a new international covenant that is efficient and truly global.

And to finish, Canada, the United States, and Mexico are good neighbors and good friends too. As sovereign countries in a modern world, we are independent and interdependent both, and I can't wait to see it at the G-20 and to welcome you at the summit in Canada for the leaders of North America next year.

[At this point, Prime Minister Harper continued in English.]

Just once again, thanks to President Calderon and to the Mexican people for their hospitality. Thanks also to President Obama for our candid and constructive exchanges on our priority issues. Those priority issues fitted into three broad categories: the economy; North American health and security; and energy, environment, and climate change.

On the economy, because of Canada's strong record of financial—on financial regulation and fiscal management, we provided an informed voice at these meetings. As we approach the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh, we continue to emphasize that countries must strengthen financial regulations and institutions, continue to implement timely economic stimulus, and maintain open markets to resist protectionism.

On North America health and security, we talked about our shared and effective response thus far to H1N1. It is a cross-border threat to all of us. The excellent cooperation among these our three countries was effective in helping to manage the initial outbreak, and we will continue our cooperative efforts.

On security, Canada recognizes the courageous commitment of President Calderon in taking on the drug traffickers. We are supporting these efforts, as it is a shared challenge for all of us in North America.

Also, on international peace and security, Canada supports ongoing OAS efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the political crisis in Honduras. We must restore both democratic governance and the rule of law.

To—sorry, excuse me, I just about missed energy and climate change. Given the integrated nature of our economies, we did talk at some length about the importance of working together on a North American approach to climate change and also on doing our best to ensure that out of Copenhagen and going forward we reach an effective and genuinely international new world protocol on greenhouse gas emissions.

To conclude, Canada, the United States, and Mexico are good neighbors and also good friends. As sovereign countries in a modern world, we are both independent and interdependent. I'm looking forward to seeing both President Calderon and President Obama at the G-20, looking forward to hosting both of you next year at Canada's summit in our great country.

Thank you.

President Obama. Good morning, and *buenos dias*. I want to thank my great friend President Calderon for his hospitality and for hosting us at this important summit, as well as my good friend Prime Minister Stephen Harper. And I want to thank the people of Guadalajara and Mexico for the incredible warmth they've shown us on this my second trip to Mexico as President.

Here in Mexico the word is "*juntos*," and in Canada it's "*ensemble*," but no matter how we say it, we come here today—three nations, one continent—because of the challenges and opportunities that we will be facing together.

Like our magnificent surroundings today, this city could not be a more fitting venue. Here in Guadalajara, we see all the richness of Mexico's heritage: its arts, its architecture, its vitality, and its culture. And we also see all the possibilities of Mexico's future: the innovation, high-tech industries, and entrepreneurship that makes this one of our hemisphere's most dynamic cities.

Here in Guadalajara, we also see our continent coming together—Mexicans, Canadians, Americans—as tourists, as neighbors, educators, and business partners, each bringing their unique traditions, each bound by mutual respect. Indeed, in the 21st century, North America is defined not simply by our borders, but by our bonds. And that is the spirit that defined the very productive summit that we had here today.

First, we agreed that we had to work together to restore our common prosperity. The global recession has cost jobs and hurt families from Toronto to Toledo to Tijuana. So we renew our commitment to work together in Ottawa, Washington, and Mexico City. Building on our progress at the G-8 and G-20 summits, we agreed to continue to take aggressive, coordinated action to restore economic growth and create jobs for our workers, including workers in the North American auto industry.

Because so much of our common prosperity and millions of jobs depend on trade that flows across our borders—billions of dollars worth of trade every day—we reaffirmed the need to reject protectionism. We recommitted ourselves to the infrastructure investments, the commonsense regulations, and intellectual property protections upon which trade thrives. We are among each other's largest trading partners. As we work together towards lasting prosperity, we need to expand that trade, not restrict it.

I would note that our common prosperity also depends on orderly, legal migration. All three of our nations have been enriched by our ties of family and community. I think of my own brother-in law, who is Canadian. I think of the many Mexican Americans from Jalisco who

have found a home in Los Angeles and Texas and in my hometown of Chicago. At the same time, Americans, Mexicans, and Canadians all expect their borders to be safe and secure. And that is why my administration will continue to work to fix America's broken immigration system in a way that is in keeping with our traditions of being both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.

And because our future prosperity also depends on clean energy economies, we built on our bilateral efforts to invest in renewable energy and green jobs, and we recommitted ourselves to the historic goals announced last month in Italy. Nations like the United States and Canada will take the lead by reducing emissions by 80 percent by 2050, and we will work with other nations to cut global emissions in half. Indeed, we've made progress toward the concrete goals that will be negotiated at the Copenhagen climate change summit in December. And I again want to commend Mexico for its leadership in curbing greenhouse gas emissions and President Calderon for his innovative proposals to help developing countries build clean, sustainable economies.

Second, we reiterated our abiding commitment to the common safety and security of our people. In response to the H1N1 pandemic, our three governments have worked closely, collaboratively, and responsibly. With science as our guide, we resolved to continue taking all necessary preparations and precautions to prepare for the upcoming flu season and protect the health of our people. And this challenge transcends borders, and so must our response.

We also resolved to continue confronting the urgent threat to our common security from the drug cartels that are causing so much violence and death in our countries. As I've said on many occasions, I heartily commend President Calderon and his Government for their determination and courage in taking on these cartels. And the President reaffirmed his Government's commitment to transparency, accountability, and human rights as they wage this difficult but necessary fight.

The United States will remain a full partner in this effort. We will work to make sure Mexico has the support it needs to dismantle and defeat the cartels. And the United States will also meet its responsibilities by continuing our efforts to reduce the demand for drugs and continuing to strengthen the security of our shared border, not only to protect the American people but to stem the illegal southbound flow of American guns and cash that helps fuel this extraordinary violence.

Third, we reaffirmed our abiding commitment to our common values, including peace, democracy, and human rights. And in particular, we discussed the coup in Honduras. As has been mentioned, our three nations stand united on this issue. President Zelaya remains the democratically elected President. For the sake of the Honduran people, democratic and constitutional order must be restored. And we will continue to work with others, especially the Organization of American States, to achieve a negotiated and peaceful solution.

And finally, we pledged to continue all these efforts. I look forward to welcoming Prime Minister Harper to Washington in September. I look forward to welcoming both of my friends at the G-20 summit in Pittsburgh, where I hope to reciprocate President Calderon's hospitality.

Our progress today is a reminder that no nation can meet the challenges of our time on our own. Our common aspirations can only be achieved if we work together. And that's what the nearly half-billion people in North America expect from us, so that's what we will do.

Thank you very much.

Moderator. Let's move on to the question-and-answer session. This will be one question per country, and we'll start off with Mexico.

Mexico-U.S. Drug Control Cooperation/Immigration Reform/Human Rights in Mexico

Q. Good afternoon, heads of state. President Obama, there are certain questions about violation of human rights here in Mexico and all these problems of fighting drug trafficking. Are you going to certify Mexico? And how can we move forward with the Merida Initiative? We've also been concerned about any attempt against Felipe Calderon's life. We know about certain threats and insecurity that prevails. This, of course, is certainly related to your country. We're concerned about the visa problem too. But what comments would you have regarding all these questions?

President Obama. I didn't get a translation on that one. [Laughter] So it sounded like a very good question. [Laughter] Here, I think it's coming. Go ahead.

Q. We're concerned about the violation of human rights here in Mexico as we fight against drug trafficking. What are your concerns regarding this? And we'd also like to know if Mexico is going to be certified, and if you will help and apply resources for the Merida Initiative? We've also heard about some attempts against the life of President Felipe Hinojosa Calderon. Do you have any knowledge of this?

And we're also concerned about national security, we're concerned about visas, et cetera. We'd like to know, is there any possibility that you might turn this around, that we might not have any limit on visas?

President Obama. Well, the—I'll just address the first two questions that seem to apply to the United States. Number one, we have been very supportive of the Merida Initiative, and we will continue to be supportive. And we have already seen resources transferred, equipment transferred, in order to help President Calderon in what is a very courageous effort to deal with a drug cartel—set of drug cartels that are not only resulting in extraordinary violence to the people of Mexico but are also undermining institutions like the police and the judiciary system that, unless stopped, will be very damaging to the country.

Now, with respect to the conduct of this battle against the cartels, I have great confidence in President Calderon's administration applying the law enforcement techniques that are necessary to curb the power of the cartels, but doing so in a way that's consistent with human rights. And we discussed this in our bilateral meeting, and I am confident that as the national police are trained, as the coordination between the military and local police officials is improved, there is going to be increased transparency and accountability and that human rights will be observed.

The biggest, by far, violators of human rights right now are the cartels themselves that are kidnapping people and extorting people and encouraging corruption in these regions. That's what needs to be stopped. That's what President Calderon is committed to doing, and that's what I'm committed to helping President Calderon accomplish as long as he is President of Mexico.

Prime Minister Harper. Are you going to answer, or just me?

President Calderon. Do you want—[inaudible]—and I after?

Prime Minister Harper. Okay. On the question of visas, it's important to understand the imposition of visa is due to one thing and one thing only, and that is the dramatic rise we have

seen over the last few years, and this year in particular, in the number of bogus refugee claims being made from Mexico into Canada.

It's important to understand that this decision, first of all, has nothing to do with the actions of the Mexican Government. The Mexican Government has cooperated with us in efforts to stem this particular problem, to limit this particular problem. It continues to work with us in ways we might reverse it.

But the underlying problem, as I've said to President Calderon and others, the underlying program—problem is in the Canadian refugee laws. It is simply far too easy in Canada to make a bogus refugee claim as a way of entering the country. And we have to change that. It is unfair to those who are legitimate refugees. It is also unfair to the hundreds of thousands of people who are working through our immigration system to become immigrants to this country—to our country.

So as I say, we will continue to work with Mexican authorities to try and limit this problem. But in the absence of legislative change, it is very difficult for our governments to control this other than through the imposition of visa. It is the only tool available to us right now. So we need additional tools from our Parliament to stem the flow of bogus refugee claimants and also to have additional tools to deal with this kind of problem.

President Calderon. Yes. Let me address these three topics, which were very important to us. First of all, my Government has an absolute and categorical commitment with human rights. The struggle, the battle we are fighting against organized crime is precisely to preserve the human rights of the Mexican people: right to safety, to security, to personal safety and integrity, and the right to have a safe family; the right to work without being really molested or perturbed; and the struggle for the security and safety of the Mexican people.

Obviously, we have a strong commitment to protect human rights of everybody, the victims and even of the criminals themselves. And this is how it has been, this is how it will continue to be, and this is how the federal police will act, the attorney generals and armed forces will act. In all of these cases, there have been a very scrupulous effort to try to protect human rights in all cases.

And anyone who says the contrary certainly would have to prove this—any case, just one case, where the proper authority has not acted in a correct way, that the competent authorities have not punished anyone who has abused their authority, whether they be police officers, whether they be soldiers, or anyone else. We have a clear commitment with human rights. We have met this commitment, and we will continue to do so, not because of any money that might come or come through the Merida Initiative or what's said in the U.S. Congress, because we have the strong commitment to human rights. And I certainly in a personal sense for several decades now, and I have always had this commitment.

I have some details about what you have pointed out, but in any case, it certainly won't be the first or the last occasion on which we might hear something about an attempt against my personal—about my life, my person. But once again, the Government just can't stop; it can't be deterred. We know that we are destroying their criminal organization. We're hitting them hard. We're hitting at the heart of their organizations. We're making them back away. And we know—they know that we're not only taking an initiative in the struggle against crime, but we are actually being able to protect, to defend our country better as time goes by.

This is not a type of vengeance, of getting back at anyone, but we want to make sure that Mexico is a safe place to live in, that we will be able to move forward in this—[inaudible].

We're not just talking about this organizations, but whether our basic objective is to provide security, safety for the Mexican people. This is something that Mexican people are entitled to, that their family, that their children can go out into the streets, they can go out to play, they can go to school, they can make progress and to fulfill their aspirations; that Mexico be a free country, free of delinquency, free of violence; that Mexico will be a safe country. And in this struggle, we're not going to be intimidated, nor are they going to put a stop to our efforts.

Once again, I certainly hope that Mexican society recognizes all of the efforts we're making along these lines, the police force who have been victims of attempts and of cowardly acts by the criminals, all the efforts carried out by Mexican marines, by soldiers, and the different attorney general's officers, because we are committed to this ideal to have a safe Mexico, to have a safe country. And these are values that we believe in, and it's certainly stronger than any threat that could be made against us, about any threat whatsoever.

So once again, we have had dialogs with Prime Minister Harper on several different occasions, as we did on this occasion, on—about the summit and the matter of visas for Mexican visitors. We've talked openly, frankly, and certainly—Mexico certainly feels very bad about this decision, about this rejection, even though, of course, it is a privilege of the Canadian Government to stipulate this. But it certainly gets in the way of a good relationship, of what Prime Minister Harper and I are doing to have good relations between our two countries. And the explanations that Prime Harper has mentioned, there certainly is a problem with this bogus refugee claim problem, and this has led to an abuse of the system.

So we're going to try to work together, to collaborate together. We're doing this here in Mexico to try to do away with the underlying causes of this abuse regarding the general system for receiving refugees in Canada.

Once again, for me it's very clear that as the President of Mexico, that I certainly have the obligation of ensuring that a specific topic on the bilateral agenda not deter reaching our full potential of other matters on the agenda.

And once again, here lies the great opportunity in this particular area of economic complementarities of the two—of the three countries' economies, and that this will take our whole region up to a higher state of competitiveness and to the benefit of our people. But these are the lines we've been working along, and I think we have been making great strides in this sense. And we certainly will continue to work along these lines in a frank and open way with Prime Minister Harper and President Obama.

Trade/Health Care

Q. Well, let me preface this by saying that we only get one question each, so I hope you will excuse me for being inexcusably longwinded. It's actually a two-parter. [Laughter] And the first part of this question is for the three leaders, primarily President Obama. And I'd appreciate it——

President Calderon. Could you use the microphone?

Q. And I would appreciate it if the Prime Minister, for the benefit of my Francophone colleagues, could answer in French as well.

The "Buy American" has caused considerable concern outside the United States. I am wondering what you discussed about "Buy American" at this meeting, and also what power you personally have to rescind this measure and whether you intend to use that power.

Now, on a not completely related topic, health care has been an issue of tremendous debate in your country, and Canadians have looked on with some fascination as our health care system has become a political football in your country. I'd like to ask Prime Minister Harper and President Obama whether there are elements of the Canadian health care system, particularly the public model, which are worth emulating.

President Obama. Well, first of all, with respect to the "Buy American" provisions, I want to assure you that your Prime Minister raises this with me every time we see each other. So that's important to note, that he is expressing, I think, his country's concerns.

I think it's also important to keep it in perspective that, in fact, we have not seen some sweeping steps towards protectionism. There was a very particular provision that was in our recovery package, our stimulus package. It did not extend beyond that. It was WTO-compliant. It was not something that I thought was necessary, but it was introduced at a time when we had a very severe economic situation, and it was important for us to act quickly and not get bogged down in debates around this particular provision.

Prime Minister Harper and I have discussed this, and there may be mechanisms whereby States and local jurisdictions can work with the Provinces to allow for cross-border procurement practices that expand the trading relationship. But I do think it's important to keep this in perspective: This is—in no way has endangered the billions of dollars of trade taking place between our two countries. It's not a general provision, but it was restricted to a very particular aspect of our recovery package.

With respect to the health care debate, we are having a vigorous debate in the United States, and I think that's a healthy thing. The reason it's necessary is because we are on a currently unsustainable path. We spend far more per person on health care than any nation on Earth. The—our outcomes in terms of various measures of well-being don't rank us at the top. We're not doing better than a lot of other advanced, developed countries that are spending much less per person.

Individual families are being bankrupted because of the lack of insurance. We've got 46, 47 million people without health insurance in our country. And for those who do have health insurance, they are always at risk of private insurers eliminating their insurance because of a preexisting condition or because of—they lose a job or they have changed jobs.

So the final aspect of it is, is that our health care inflation is going up so rapidly that our Federal budget simply can't sustain it, nor can businesses that are increasingly having to make decisions whether they hire more workers or eliminate health care, whether they stop providing coverage or they force more costs on to their workers. So the whole system is not working well.

Now, how do we change it? When it's one-sixth of the U.S. economy, there are going to be a lot of opinions. And Congress has moved forward, and we are closer to achieving a serious health reform package than we have been in the last 40 to 50 years. But there is going to continue to be a vigorous debate.

I've said that the Canadian model works for Canada; it would not work for the United States, in part simply because we've evolved differently. We have a employer-based system and a private-based health care system that stands side by side with Medicare and Medicaid and our Veterans Administration health care system. And so we've got to develop a uniquely American approach to this problem.

This, by the way, is a problem that all countries are going to have to deal with at some level because if medical inflation continues at the pace that it's going, everybody's budgets are going to be put under severe strain. And so what we're trying to do is make sure that we've got a sensible plan that provides coverage for everybody, that continues the role of the private marketplace, but provides people who don't have health insurance or have fallen through the cracks in the private marketplace a realistic and meaningful option. And we've got to do it in a way that also changes our delivery system so that we're not engaged in the kind of wasteful, inefficient medical spending that is so costly to us.

So I suspect that we're going to have continued vigorous debate. I suspect that you Canadians will continue to get dragged in by those who oppose reform, even though I've said nothing about Canadian health care reform. I don't find Canadians particularly scary, but I guess some of the opponents of reform think that they make a good boogeyman. I think that's a mistake. And I suspect that once we get into the fall and people look at the actual legislation that's being proposed, that more sensible and reasoned arguments will emerge, and we're going to get this passed.

Sorry to take so long on the question.

Prime Minister Harper. With respect to your first question, yesterday we discussed this problem. I'm very happy to recently see that it's an agreement among the Provinces and the federation to have a common front with respect to this problem. There have been a lot of discussions among American and Canadian ministers, ministers of trade, and also our public officials. These talks will continue once I meet again with President Obama over the next couple of months.

With respect to health care, the only thing I could say is the Canadians certainly support their own system, and the rest is really an American debate.

And it's up to the Provinces, for example, in Canada——

[Prime Minister Harper continued in English.]

On "Buy American," we did have a good discussion, as President Obama said. I'm very happy to see that our Provinces and the Federal Government have recently come to an agreement to work collectively on this matter, which is largely, actually, within their jurisdiction since this concerns subnational procurement. Our respective trade ministers have been talking, officials are talking, and we anticipate, I anticipate that President Obama and I will be discussing this at greater length in our upcoming discussions.

On the American health care debate, on the debate over the system of health care, as we know, as you know well, Canadians support their own health care system. As for the rest of this question, my only answer is that this is an American debate and a responsibility of the Provinces.

Moderator. Ginger Thompson, New York Times.

Immigration Reform/Situation in Honduras/Border Security

Q. I'd like to start with President Obama, please. Given the fight that you're having to wage for health care, I wonder if you can tell us what you think the prospects are for immigration reform, for comprehensive immigration reform, which you've said is your goal, and whether you think that the blows you're taking now on health care and that the Democrats are likely to take around the midterm elections will make it hard, if not impossible, to achieve

comprehensive immigration reform in this term, and what you've told President Calderon about that.

President Calderon, I'd like to hear a little bit about your thoughts on Honduras. There have been some in Latin America who have said that the United States has not acted strongly enough to return President Zelaya to power. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you feel about what the United States should be doing or could be doing to restore democratic order in Honduras.

And, Prime Minister Harper, a few months ago, the Homeland Security Secretary of the United States went to Canada—or at least aggravated Canadian sensibilities when she compared the Canadian border to the Mexican border. And I wonder what you think about that and how you feel about the United States using some of the enforcement strategies adopted on the southern border in the north. Thank you.

President Obama. That's all? [*Laughter*]

Q. That's all, Mr. President.

President Obama. Well, first of all, Ginger, I don't know if you're doing some prognosticating about the outcome of the midterm elections, which are over a year away. I anticipate we'll do just fine. And I think when all is said on health care reform, the American people are going to be glad that we acted to change an unsustainable system so that more people have coverage, we're bending the cost curve, and we're getting insurance reform so that people don't get dropped because of preexisting conditions or other issues.

So understand, though, I'm not acting based on short-term political calculations. I'm looking at what's best for the country long term. If I had been making short-term political calculations, I wouldn't be standing here as President, because nobody calculated that I could win the Presidency.

With respect to immigration reform, I continue to believe that is also in the long-term interests of the United States. We have a broken immigration system. Nobody denies it. And if we continue on the path we're on, we will continue to have tensions with our Mexican neighbors; we will continue to have people crossing the borders in a way that is dangerous for them, unfair for those who are applying legally to immigrate; we're going to continue to have employers who are exploiting workers because they're not within a legal system and so, oftentimes, are receiving less than minimum wage or don't have overtime or being abused in other fashion. That's going to depress U.S. wages. It's causing ongoing tensions inside the United States. It's not fair, and it's not right, and we're going to change it.

Now, I've got a lot on my plate, and it's very important for us to sequence these big initiatives in a way where they don't all just crash at the same time. And what we've said is, in the fall when we come back, we're going to complete health care reform. We still have to act on energy legislation that has passed the House, but the Senate, I'm sure, is going to have its own ideas about how it wants to approach it. We still have financial regulatory reform that has to get done because we don't want a situation in which irresponsible actions in the global financial markets can precipitate another crisis. That's a pretty big stack of bills.

Fortunately, what we've been able to do is to begin meeting with both Democrats and Republicans from the House and the Senate. Secretary Napolitano is coordinating these discussions, and I would anticipate that before the year is out, we will have draft legislation

along with sponsors potentially in the House and the Senate who are ready to move this forward, and when we come back next year, that we should be in a position to start acting.

Now, am I going to be able to snap my fingers and get this done? No. This is going to be difficult; it's going to require bipartisan cooperation. There are going to be demagogues out there who try to suggest that any form of pathway for legalization for those who are already in the United States is unacceptable. And those are fights that I'd have to have if my poll numbers are at 70 or if my poll numbers are at 40. That's just the nature of the U.S. immigration debate.

But ultimately, I think the American people want fairness. And we can create a system in which you have strong border security, we have an orderly process for people to come in, but we're also giving an opportunity for those who are already in the United States to be able to achieve a pathway to citizenship so that they don't have to live in the shadows and their children and their grandchildren can have a full participation in the United States. So I'm confident we can get it done.

Oh, excuse me, I know this wasn't directed at me, but I just want to make one quick point on Honduras, because you repeated something that I've heard before. The same critics who say that the United States has not intervened enough in Honduras are the same people who say that we're always intervening and Yankees need to get out of Latin America. You can't have it both ways.

We have been very clear in our belief that President Zelaya was removed from office illegally, that it was a coup, and that he should return. We have cooperated with all the international bodies in sending that message. Now, if these critics think that it's appropriate for us to suddenly act in ways that in every other context they consider inappropriate, then I think what that indicates is, is that maybe there's some hypocrisy involved in their approach to U.S.-Latin America relations that certainly is not going to guide my administration's policies.

President Calderon. Thank you. I will now make the most of this question. Now, in regard to migration, actually many of the people who work active in the United States, who live in the shadow, live in this State—or come from Jalisco, this State. These are people who have migrated in order to build a better future for their families. All of them, or most of them, have enormously contributed to the American society and the American economy, and it is unthinkable to see that the U.S., the main power, the main economic power in the world, without the contribution of the Mexican laborers and workers. This is not only a good will statement.

And in—during our meeting, we handed the delegations the benefits of North America and what the Mexican population represents in terms of age, in regard to the total population in the U.S. The only way to have sustained progress throughout the North American region, especially, is allowing for the natural economic processes, for integration can happen, and this implies the labor mobility that cannot be determined by mandate or by decree.

This is what we have underscored with President Obama during this meeting, to keep on invoking the protection for the Mexican laborers, whatever their migration conditions are in the United States, and our highest commendments to the way President Obama has tackled this migration issue now.

Aside from defending the rights of the Mexican laborers in the U.S., that one day instead of the Mexican people to have to leave their country because they're hungry or because they have to risk their lives, we need an economic scheme where we have great investments coming

from the U.S., hailing from Canada, and opening here the labor opportunities that the Mexicans so need.

I think President Barack Obama has responded to the topic on—or to the issue on Honduras, whatever—what we have discussed and agreed as what needs to be done to build the international actions that have been taken in order to reestablish the democracy in Honduras, to strengthen the OAS and the delegation that is about to meet in Tegucigalpa, to build the mediation actions that Oscar Arias, President for Costa Rica and Nobel Peace—Nobel Prize, is carrying out in order to reestablish the constitutional law in Honduras.

This is not about a person or another. This is not about President Zelaya himself or per se. It is about the constitutional and democratic life that ought to be defended in regard to the international legal framework that we have all agreed upon.

And one more expression: I coincide in the contradiction highlighted by President Obama. Those who have rejected or who have argued about the intervention of the United States in the region are those who now are claiming for the determination or the intervention of the U.S. in the region, no matter how legal this action might be.

So we have to resort to international law and international instances beyond the intervention of one single state—or even more, the intervention of one single person—to resolve such a dispute and such an issue. This is the path to be taken.

Today, we congratulate ourselves that President Obama is leading the administration of the United States. But in the past, that happened; but in the future, we don't know who might be President next. And I am not of those who share the idea that the U.S. are elected as the ultimate judge and the ultimate, sovereign resolver through the intermediation of the affairs in our countries.

Yes, we have to open the path to the OAS, to the international organizations, to the regional group that we have formed, such as the Rio Group, such as the groups that are friends of North America, the countries that are—that befriend Honduras, that befriend Central America, that befriend Guatemala. These countries must act on our own account, but in observance of the international law and the rules we have settled ourselves. We have to form a group of friends of Honduras that through—with the help of Oscar Arias and with the help of the OAS and their corresponding actions.

Prime Minister Harper. Just briefly, Minister Van Loan and Secretary Napolitano have been—and our officials have been meeting regularly on management of our shared border. I think we have a good, cooperative relationship in that regard. There's, obviously, always work to be done.

Let me be very clear: From the Canadian perspective, we look at our border as a line between the two closest countries on Earth. We have the largest trading relationship of any two countries on Earth, but we also share security concerns. I've said repeatedly, I say again, there is no such thing as a threat to the security of the United States which is not a threat to the security of Canada. That is why Canada has been a steadfast ally of the United States in NAFTA and NORAD for many, many years.

We want to address all the same security issues that the United States wants to address, and we want to do so in a way that doesn't impede commerce and doesn't impede the great social interaction which has made our two countries so close over the decades.

I'm just going to also weigh in a little bit, as a friend of the United States, on that question that was posed to President Obama. If I were an American, I would be really fed up with this kind of hypocrisy; you know, the United States is accused of meddling except when it's accused of not meddling, and the same types of—same types who are demanding the United States to somehow intervene in Honduras, the same type of people who would condemn longstanding security cooperation between Colombia and the United States, which is being done for legitimate security and drug traffic reasons that is, frankly—that are in the interests of all the countries of this hemisphere.

Mexico and Canada are involved in the mediation effort in supporting—directly supporting the mediation effort of President Arias. I think the United States has been a very—very forcefully articulated its concerns and its desired outcomes in that regard and has been very supportive of those of us who are working in the multilateral process to deal with this serious issue in the hemisphere. So I think that's precisely what we want to see from the United States, is a United States that leads on issues of values, but is very supportive of multilateral attempts to deal with challenges that we all face.

President Obama. Thank you.

President Calderon. Thank you. *Gracias, todos.*

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:15 a.m. at the Cabanas Cultural Center. In his remarks, the President referred to his brother-in-law Konrad Ng; and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano. Prime Minister Harper referred to U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk; and Minister of International Trade and the Asia-Pacific Gateway Stockwell Day and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Peter Van Loan of Canada. President Calderon and a reporter spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. Prime Minister Harper spoke partly in French, and those portions of his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Mexico, President Calderon Hinojosa, and Canada, Prime Minister Harper.

Locations: Guadalajara, Mexico.

Names: Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Harper, Stephen; Napolitano, Janet A.; Ng, Konrad; Zelaya Rosales, Jose Manuel.

Subjects: Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Canada : Prime Minister; Canada : Trade with U.S.; Commerce, international : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Stabilization efforts; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Unrest; Commerce, international : Group of Eight (G-8) nations; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Defense and national security : Border security; Diseases : Global influenza outbreak; Drug abuse and trafficking : Foreign narcotics traffickers; Drug abuse and trafficking : Interdiction efforts; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid;

Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Honduras : Democracy and human rights issues; Honduras : President; Honduras : Removal and expulsion of President Zelaya; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal arms trade, reduction efforts; Legislation, proposed : "American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009"; Mexico : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction efforts; Mexico : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Crime and narcotics trafficking; Mexico : Democracy and human rights issues; Mexico : Merida Initiative; Mexico : President; Mexico : President Obama's visits; North American Leaders' Summit; Veterans : Health care; Western Hemisphere : Organization of American States; World Trade Organization.

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